DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 406 807 EC 305 513

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TITLE Influences on the Development of Three Preservice Special Educators: A Case Study.
PUB DATE Aug 96
NOTE 25p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Case Studies; *Disabilities; Elementary Secondary Education; Higher Education; *Preservice Teacher Education; Qualitative Research; *Socialization; *Special Education Teachers; *Student Development; *Student Teachers; Student Teaching
IDENTIFIERS Preservice Teachers; *Professional Socialization

ABSTRACT

This study examined the student teaching experience of three preservice special education teachers. Journal entries, observations, and participant interviews were used to develop a description of the experience from the perspective of the participants. The case studies were organized around the following topics: how preservice special educators construct their concepts of special education; the image of special educators that student teachers bring to their student teaching experience; what the student teachers learn of their role within a specific school culture; how they adjust to the unwritten rules and ways of being part of the school culture; and effects of the school placement, university preparation, cooperating teacher, and university supervisor in shaping the student teacher's experience. The research identified three major themes related to prior perceptions, reactions to the building culture, and choices of teaching strategies. Findings were also analyzed in terms of personal, ecological, and professional knowledge and skills dimensions. The study concluded that the student teachers made strong connections between university preparation and actual classroom practice in student teaching experiences, especially when supported by professionals in a collegial atmosphere. (Contains 53 references.) (DB)

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INFLUENCES ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF THREE PRESERVICE SPECIAL EDUCATORS: A CASE STUDY

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> Teacher professional development is not a simple , spontaneous process, but the outcome of a complex interaction between individual teachers and the various environments in which they are participating. The nature of (beginning) teachers' professional development is a function of the interaction between person-related and environmental factors. This process cannot be envisaged separate from its environment context. (Vonk, 1995b, p.90)

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the student teaching experience of three special educators. In this study, the student teaching experience represents a personal encounter between a student's perceptions of the teaching professional and the actual, real world of professional teaching (Debolt, 1983; Brimfield, 1983; Britzman, 1992). A second understanding for this study is that the student teaching experience marks the beginning of a teachers's professional development (Debolt, 1983; Brimfield, 1983; Britzman; 1992; Koehler, 1986; Hargreaves, 1992 and Vonk, 1994). During this experience, student teachers begin the process of creating professional identities. Additionally the preservice teaching experience is defined as a complex learning process that is also an occupational socialization experience. Student teachers learn how to "be" professional teachers. As the study progressed it became evident that a number of factors influenced the perceptions, experiences, and the sense each student teacher made of this vital period in their professional development. Vonk's three dimensional framework for professional teacher development emerged as the conceptual framework for the interpretation and understanding of this study. This study represents one small, particular qualitative moment in the professional development of three preservice special educators.

Because the central purpose of this study was to understand the student teaching

experience of three special educators, a methodology that allowed a "close to practice" description of the experience was needed (Vonk, 1994). Thus, I chose an interpretive methodology that would allow the experience to be described, analyzed, and interpreted (Wolcott, 1994). As a result of this choice, journal entries, observations, and participant interviews were used to develop a thick description of the experience from the perspective of the participants. Emergent themes were recorded in an ongoing fashion throughout the study. As a participant researcher, my own reactions and questions concerning this experience were also recorded as part of the data.

A review of the literature pertinent to the student teaching experience of special educators revealed little research into this significant socialization period. However, the review did reveal some consistent factors concerning the experience of regular educators and some specific factors related to the experience of special educators. As the study progressed, three large categories of the experience emerged during the initial analysis of the data. These categories were prior perceptions and teacher image, reactions to the school cultures, and issues concerning methods and strategies for each student teacher.

Links between these three large categories were elusive at first. As I began the initial analysis of these student teachers' experience concentrating on one aspect of their experiences, such as strong prior teaching perceptions, silenced other equally significant aspects of the experience. As the study progressed, Vonk's (1995a) conceptual framework emerged to describe the elusive linkage between all three major themes. This framework described the simultaneous reflection, learning, and resultant growth that each student teacher exhibited throughout the study. It also described the significance of the building cultures each student teacher encountered, and their choice of methods and strategies in each classroom assignment. Using Vonk's framework enabled me to connect and further describe the many factors that were revealed by this research.

Several consistent themes relating to the student teachers' prior image of teacher and prior beliefs about teaching emerged as a result of the student teachers' initial journal

entries. Several important themes concerning the learning or constructions that resulted from the experience emerged as the data were analyzed. The most significant theme concerned the role and place of special teachers within a school environment. Conclusions based on these themes and patterns of data were formulated to answer the initial study questions. As each case study was written, participants were asked to read and verify if the cases presented a true picture of the student teaching experience. Each participant verified the observations, analysis, and conclusions of the individual cases.

As stated previously, this study represents one vital period in the professional development of three special educators. It is constrained by time, place, culture, and interpretation. No attempt is made to generalize the conclusions to either teacher preparation programs or the general population of special educators. However, the study provides insights for others attempting to gain an understanding of special teachers' perspectives, learning, and responses to their professional roles. Conclusions drawn from this study should be used to generate more questions for future inquiry. Additionally, the study represents only one story out of many stories that could have been written concerning what is salient to preservice special educators.

Research Questions and Discussion.

How do preservice special educators construct their image of special educators? As the literature suggested (Lortie, 1975; Zeichner & Gore, 1992; Kagan, 1992, Britzman; 1992), each student teacher constructed her prior image of special educator by internalizing the myriad hours spent in the presence of teachers during her public school career. Further, each student teacher possessed a view of herself as a marginalized student. Gretchen and Lucy had been identified as exceptional students and placed in separate special education classrooms. Leigh had been an underachiever for most of her school career. However, each had encountered an exemplary teacher who had changed this view of herself as an underachieving learner. These early, strong teaching models were believed to be teachers who "saved" these student teachers from either continued academic failure or

a sense of being marginalized students. As a result of these encounters, each student teacher constructed a prior image of teacher based on these experiences as learners (Lortie, 1975; Vonk, 1995b).

The student teaching experience did not radically alter these student teachers' prior image of teacher as one who "saves" students. As a result of confrontations within the building ecologies, each student teacher extended this savior image to include advocacy for special needs' students within the school culture. This was done by re-orienting the prior teacher image as they reflected on the confrontations in each building. However, this prior image of the teacher as one who saves remained the defining filter through which the student teachers viewed and learned from the entire student teaching experience.

What prior image of being a special educator do student teachers bring to the student teaching experience? Individually, each defined these prior images of teacher in slightly different ways. For Leigh, a teacher was one who saves students by empowering them to learn through her constant search for appropriate ways to teach them. For Gretchen a teacher was one who saves by establishing a caring classroom environment. Lucy defines her advocacy as ensuring that students with special needs have access to the entire curriculum and are treated with respect within the school environment.

These individual images of special educators remained essentially unchanged as a result of the student teaching experience. The student teaching experience caused each student teacher to extend this prior savior image to include one who advocates for special needs students in the school culture.

Further, it became evident that each student teacher lived out this prior image through her choice of teaching strategies and behavior management methods and reactions to the teaching ecology. Leigh defined her Writing Workshop language arts approach as a strategy that unlocked students' writing abilities. Gretchen chose a behavior modification strategy as a means of ending classroom confrontations because "she cared enough about these students to want them to learn something." Lucy insisted on incorporating academic

instruction for MH students, despite her cooperating teacher's emphasis on vocational education.

By the end of the student teaching experience, each student teacher had extended this prior belief of a teacher as one who saves to include the definition of a teacher as one who advocates for special needs students within the school culture. That is, each student teacher believed special educators must act as advocates for special needs students in opposition to, or as buffer, against the regular education culture that dominates the school environment.

This change in prior image occurred because of confrontations concerning special needs students within each building ecology. Leigh was angered by regular educators' refusals to allow sixth grade LD students into the classroom. Gretchen was upset at middle school regular educators' reactions to including a DH student in their classrooms. Lucy was frustrated by regular educators' refusal to acknowledge the presence of her students within the high school. These and other confrontations concerning inclusive practices served to shape the prior savior image of these student teachers into one of a teacher who saves and advocates.

What do preservice special educators learn of their role within a specific school culture? Wolcott (1994) and Hargreaves and Fullan (1992) believe that a school culture consists of not only the written [obvious], but also the unwritten [hidden or simply accepted] rules and ways of being. The question then becomes, "What did these students learn about the obvious role of special educator as teacher within a school culture?" Additionally, "What were the hidden expectations of this school culture concerning the role of special educator?"

Leigh, Gretchen, and Lucy learned how to monitor the classroom, plan lessons, initiate instruction, and intervene with behavior problems. They learned how to organize schedules, fill out forms, and conference with parents. Much of their university preparation concerning assessment, behavior management and teaching skills was utilized

in each student teaching assignment. These obvious written rules and ways of being a special educator were acquired by observation, modeling, and direct instruction from the cooperating teachers.

The interactions with fellow special educators and observations of regular educators' responses to special education left these student teachers with an understanding of the hidden expectations of the culture of the schools. These hidden expectations included being "keepers of a dumping ground for unwanted students," using curricula that was "only baby-sitting and teaching ABCs," having teaching roles and space that were not as important or valued as other teaching roles, and space and having interactions with regular educators that could be tension filled and extremely difficult. They came to believe this special education teaching role was defined by regular educators as one that has a different morality, different teaching skills, and a different view of special needs children than does the regular education culture.

Each of these student teachers came to believe her role within the school culture was one of both teacher and advocate for students with special needs. This belief concerning advocacy was defined in subtle differences for each student teacher. Leigh began to see her role as a buffer between students with special needs and regular educators. Gretchen defined her advocacy as speaking up for these students within the building and defending their humanity before regular educators. Lucy extended her definition to guaranteeing a complete academic program for these students, as well as acting as an advocate for these students with the regular teachers within the building.

<u>During this exposure to a school culture, how do they adjust to the unwritten rules and ways of being?</u> As Vonk (1995a) maintains, each student teacher displayed strategic adaptations to the school culture. These student teachers both adapted to certain aspects that they felt most comfortable with, and at other times, went their own ways. This occurred when Leigh joined the gripe sessions at Iroquois Elementary, adding her complaints to the discussion. Also Lucy eagerly adapted to her first cooperating teacher's

approach to teaching multi-handicapped students because she agreed with this approach. However, at the secondary level, she strategically adapted Ms. Singhe's vocational approach while continuing to emphasize her own priority of academic skills. Finally Gretchen initiated her own plans and behavior management, even though her behavior management strategy did not match Ms. Searcy's approach. As for the unwritten rules that special educators eat at certain tables, sit together during teachers meetings, and speak out on behalf of students with special needs, each student teacher adapted to these unwritten rules and way of being within these school environments.

As Hargreaves (1992) believes, and Pugach queried (1992), each student teacher ended the experience with a strong sense of being a member of a separate culture of teachers. Leigh showed evidence of this in her journal as she began consistently to identify herself as a special teacher, and again in a final interview when she declared that "regular teachers see us as different from them." Gretchen revealed this understanding as she completed a third student teaching placement. She was convinced that she had stepped over an invisible boundary between regular educator and special educator. Unlike what Pugach (1992) suggests, none of the student teachers viewed herself as a member of a dual culture. They identified themselves as belonging to only one culture or subgroup of teachers. Lucy indicated this belief when she described how regular and special educators within her two assigned buildings had little interaction with each other. In her view, this lack of interaction contributed to a lack of understanding about regular and special educators' work and purposes within the school.

<u>During the student teaching experience of special educators, do the school placement, university preparation, cooperating teacher, and university supervisor shape the special educators' experience of student teaching in similar ways?</u> Research into the preservice experience of regular educators reveals that school placement, university preparation, the cooperating teacher , and the university supervisor have a significant impact on this experience for regular preservice educators (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1992;

Billingsely & Tomchin 1992; Britzman, 1992; Kagan, 1992; Lortie, 1975). Each school placement contributed to each student teacher's sense of belonging to a separate teaching culture. The attitudes, behaviors, and conflicts each encountered did not challenge the prior teaching image that a teacher is one who saves, but rather caused this view of the teaching role to be extended to include one of advocacy for special needs students.

Kagan (1992) suggests that university preparation and practica experiences remain separate in student teachers' views--i.e., there is little relationship between actual teaching practice and theory. In each case, these three student teachers used university preparation as an integral part of the student teaching experience. In these cases, strong links were formed between theory and practice within a special education classroom. Each student teacher used and implemented much of her university training in these classrooms because the use of this training was an expectation and a practice of both the cooperating teacher and the university supervisor. Therefore, they expected the student teachers to be familiar with assessment methods, behavior analysis, and specific pedagogies. The result of this expectation was a student teaching experience that strongly linked university preparation with actual practice in the classroom. This conclusion will be further discussed in a later section of this discussion.

Cooperating teachers shaped each student teacher's view of her role within the culture in several ways. Ms. Searcy bluntly told Gretchen that regular educators view special educators as mentally retarded or developmentally handicapped because of teaching this population. In this instance, she provided Gretchen with the belief that she was viewed by regular educators as "less than" a regular teacher. Through her encounters with other teachers, Ms. Alexander showed both Leigh and Gretchen that her role as a special educator was not as important as that of a regular educator. Leigh witnessed this as regular educators asked her cooperating teacher to "watch" their classrooms because she was not doing anything worthwhile in the special education classroom. Lucy's cooperating teacher

passively allowed the regular educators to unhesitatingly invade her air-conditioned classroom and assign her teaching and students to a corner.

In this student teaching experience, the university supervisor came to occupy a unique role in the classroom. Because I spent a great deal of time assisting in the classroom, my presence became an accepted part of the classroom environment. Indeed, on numerous occasions, I participated as part of the instructional team. This "close to practice" approach gave me numerous opportunities to offer support, feedback, and discussion concerning each student teacher's perceptions of the teaching role and use of strategies and methods. My role became similar to what Vonk (1994) described as a teaching mentor.

However, my presence in each classroom altered the research scene (Garmston & Wellman, 1995). From the beginning of the research, I was continually astounded by two patterns of behavior exhibited by these student teachers. First, they all displayed considerable autonomy in their planning, behavior management, and pedagogies. I observed each simply going her own way, as Vonk (1995a) described it, in terms of her teaching and management of the various classrooms. Leigh proceeded to use Writing Workshop in her first placement, despite her cooperating teacher's lack of enthusiasm for this approach. Gretchen immediately initiated her own behavior management program when she began to solo teach. Lucy did not hesitate to teach academic subjects, despite the strong vocational curriculum of her cooperating teacher. In each case, I observed a great deal of university preparation being enacted within each classroom.

Granted, these observations of my own teaching of methods, behavior management, and assessment classes invoked a very real pride in me for these prospective teachers. However, I had not observed this in previous student teaching assignments. It was not until the assignments ended and I reflected on the experience that I realized what might have happened as a result of my presence within each classroom.

My presence and the awareness of my research foreshadowed the use of university preparation in the cooperating classrooms. Each student teacher felt constrained to use methods I had taught them, and each cooperating teacher felt constrained to allow those methods to be used. Indeed the presence of another professional in the classroom gave these cooperating teachers the extra freedom to allow such methods to be used. By the time each student teacher began the period of solo teaching, my presence had moved over an invisible boundary of being a participant researcher/supervisor to being a participant mentor. At that time, our conversations and my presence insured support for these prospective teacher's attempts to utilize and learn from their enactment of university preparation.

Such strong use of university preparation occurred for several reasons. Firstly, the chosen cooperating teachers still exhibited and used much of their own university training, albeit, each in their own way. Ms. Alexander alluded to this when she discussed coming straight from the university and using all of her preparation. Ms. Searcy pointedly asked Gretchen questions concerning the use of certain assessments, and Gretchen acknowledged this by linking the questions to her university assessment class. Lucy used her university training to monitor and record the behaviors of two students exhibiting extreme behavior problems. Additionally, each cooperating teacher recognized or believed that part of my purpose for being in the classroom was to evaluate the use of these university strategies. Further, these cooperating teachers strongly believed the student teaching experience had to be a time for prospective special educators to use their university preparation within their cooperating teachers' classrooms in order to develop their own unique teaching style. As a result of these beliefs, each cooperating teacher willing and graciously allowed these student teachers considerable autonomy, support, and feedback so they could explore this significant element of their professional development. Finally, the student teachers believed the purpose of my presence in the classroom was to evaluate their use of university preparation as part of this study. This belief was confirmed when I revisited the

schools, cooperating teachers, and student teachers and asked them if my conclusions were correct. Each cooperating teacher and former student teacher corroborated these conclusions during my later visits and conversations with them.

Surprisingly, inclusion initiatives caused significant confrontations between regular and special educators in each school setting. Indeed, part of the student teachers' perception of belonging to a separate school culture was shaped by encounters with regular educators concerning inclusion issues. These environmental encounters concerning inclusive practices further shaped each student teacher's self-identity as advocate for students with special needs and contributed to a sense of belonging to a separate culture of marginalized teachers (Vonk, 1995b; Hargreaves & Fullan, 1992; Pugach, 1992). Leigh believed regular educators viewed special education classrooms as "dumping grounds" for unwanted students. Gretchen believed regular educators regarded special needs students as "demon spawn," and therefore wished to keep them separated in other classrooms. Lucy believed regular educators ignored the presence of these students in their buildings and simply refused to interact with them in any manner.

Themes and Conclusions.

Early in the study, three large themes of prior perceptions, reactions to the building cultures, and choices of teaching strategies were linked by Vonk's (1995a) conceptual framework. Significantly, this conceptual framework views the student teacher's learning and meaning making of the student teaching experience as the apotheosis of the experience. As stated in this framework, the teacher as a person with prior perceptions, values, and pedagogies is the instrument of the teaching act (Vonk, 1995a).

The Personal Dimension. "Student teachers still have a student's image of the teacher role and behave accordingly" (Vonk, 1995a, p. 5). As Vonk (1995a) and other researchers maintain, Leigh, Gretchen, and Lucy began the student teaching experience with their prior image of a teacher as one who saves unchallenged by university preparation. They encountered the beginning-teacher problems Vonk (1995a) described as

a result of this predisposition. For example, they did not expect to confront serious behavior control problems, they did not expect indifferent students, and they did not expect to have to behave as controlling monitors of a classroom environment (Vonk, 1995a).

In a sense, encounters with the environment of both schools in a sense reawakened this strong identification with students; Leigh identified with her students with the words "like me," and Gretchen identified with the students by using the words "like I was." Lucy identified in a slightly different way--her intense feelings of alienation as being set apart by her label of gifted made her strongly identify with multi-handicapped students because she immediately perceived them as set apart; she described how regular educators would avert their eyes if she and an MH student approached them.

As Vonk (1995a) states, beginning teachers are overwhelmed by the "new teacher responsibilities" of scheduling, dealing with individual academic needs according to IEPs, and organizing a classroom to provide for each of these needs. Each confronted a classroom situation in which she lost control of the class or had to intervene within the class in a way she never envisioned. Examples of this are when Gretchen had to stop students from fighting, and when Leigh had to take students out into the hall for talks about behavior. Also, Lucy had to exercise her authority in the high school classroom.

None of the student teachers was prepared for the strong emotional reactions created by encounters with a school environment (Vonk, 1995a). Leigh discovered that teachers at Iroquois would ask her or Ms. Alexander to ignore their own classroom to monitor other classrooms; Gretchen was angered by the disciplinary procedures used on a special needs student; and when Lucy was angered by a teacher's refusal to let her teach regular education students.

As Vonk (1995a) maintains, new responsibilities and serious emotional reactions create a praxis shock, causing these student teachers to re-orient themselves to this teaching role. Their idealized versions of relationships within the larger school culture changed. Their view of themselves as teachers changed to a view of themselves as special teachers,

members of a separate teaching culture that has a different morality, set of values, and style of teaching for certain separated students. As a result of the enactment of their university preparation and their observations, they viewed their actual teaching practices as different from those of regular education colleagues.

The Ecological Dimension. "As argued before, beginning teachers develop professionally in a specific school context" (Vonk, 1995a, p. 6). Each student teacher coped with new responsibilities and expectations in a teaching culture in each school. This teaching culture had written and unwritten rules. Written rules involved the obvious teaching, planning, and managing of classrooms. These written rules were quickly understood and adopted as part of the special educator role.

Unwritten rules, which stated that special needs students do not belong in certain classes, special needs teachers sit together and do not communicate with other teachers, DH teachers are DH because they teach DH students, and special education teachers have a larger morality clause than other teachers created severe praxis shock as these women encountered a school culture unlike their previous expectations. As Vonk (1984) maintains, these expectations about the ecology of the school caused these student teachers to use one of three adaptation strategies. In some instances, they adopted that culture, as evidenced when Lucy joined the special education teachers at their lunch room table, when Gretchen joined the smoking group at the local grocery store corner, and when Leigh joined the gripe sessions. In other instances, they strategically adapted to the culture; Leigh introduced Writing Workshop with her small group of students, Gretchen agreed to continue using Ms. Searcy's behavior management plan, and Lucy, despite her boredom, continued to monitor the high school students in the lunch room. In other instances, these student teachers "followed their own pace" (Vonk, 1995a). Leigh consistently took students into the hall for talks concerning behavior, Gretchen began to decorate Ms. Searcy's dark, brown room and initiated her own behavior management strategies, and Lucy began to teach a sexual awareness unit despite her cooperating teacher's disapproval.

Each of these decisions grew out of a combination of reactions to the ecology of the school and strong personal beliefs concerning the role of teacher within the environment.

Professional Knowledge and Skills Dimension. "The professional knowledge and skills a beginning teacher has to develop concern three sub-dimensions: pedagogical content knowledge, classroom management skills and teaching skills (Vonk, 1995a, p. 7). Vonk (1995a) believes this development of professional knowledge and skills occurs simultaneously and "Pre-conceptions of 'good practice' play a dominant role" (p.7). Within this dimension, these student teachers' university preparation continually provided the basis for their instruction. However, their prior perceptions also colored their view of good practice. This dimension reveals an important difference for special educators. As Kagan (1992) maintains, university theory and practica experiences remain separated for regular educators. This was not the case for these women. Each observed fellow professionals using various aspects of university preparation in the teaching of special needs students. Therefore, these student teachers consciously enacted and used much of their university preparation in each classroom. Their teaching units, behavior management strategies, and methodology perspectives were consistently applied in each special needs classroom.

Also, as these approaches were implemented, the student teachers discovered the simultaneity of teaching (Vonk, 1995). As a result of this simultaneity, the student teachers' professional knowledge and skills dimension began to acquire a "rich, factual knowledge base with many interconnections" about making subject matter available to their students. Gretchen became aware that one student needed a specific approach and that another student could not work with Josh. Lucy became aware that one student spoke Greek, and that another non-verbal student could respond to academic instruction. Leigh stepped back and took a look at what each student could do and realized it represented a mile of learning for the particular student.

To return to the previous description of Vonk's (1995a) framework of professional development as facets of a moving gem, the participants' personal dimensions of prior perceptions and beliefs concerning themselves as both learners and as teachers acted as filters and frames for their confrontations with the ecology of the student teaching environments. These confrontations caused a cognitive dissonance or conflict between this personal dimension and the ecology dimension. These conflicts were resolved through their prior beliefs and values and with certain strategic adaptations within environments that honored their autonomy to do so. Each developed the knowledge and skills dimension by enacting much of her university preparation. As a result, each discovered a personal teaching style.

Further, each experienced a significant moment in which she felt recognized as a teacher. Vonk (1994a) believes this encounter defines the moment when novice teachers begin to see themselves as members of a professional culture of teaching. As they gained confidence in their teaching styles and abilities from this recognition encounter, their self-concepts as special teachers were strengthened; they emerged from the experience feeling empowered and ready to assume a place in the profession.

> Our research has led to the conclusion that there does not exist a hierarchy in dimensions . . . . Beginners develop professionally in all three dimensions concurrently; the development in one dimension supports the development in the other two and visa versa. If beginners are not carefully supported with that reflection--because most beginners are not able to bring theory and practice together--they may stick to learning by trial and error. One may not expect this to result in proper quality teaching but rather in the continuation of traditional classroom teaching. (Vonk, 1995a, p. 11)

Implications for Preparation, Professional Development, Sense Making.

For Teacher Preparation. From this study, it is apparent that university educators must be aware of the need for research and understanding concerning the presence of

numerous teaching cultures in a single school. Hargreaves and Fullan (1992) maintain that the lack of common curriculum concerns--e.g., English teachers work with other English teachers--serves to marginalize or separate special educators from the regular teacher culture within a building. This study revealed there are other factors involved in this marginalization of special educators. Regular educators' perceptions of special educators as "baby sitters," beliefs that special education curricula are radically different from regular education curricula, discomfort with the presence of severely handicapped students, and the definition of special educators as "nicer, more patient" appears to fuel this perception of special educators as different, unique, and set apart from the regular education culture.

Both Leigh and Gretchen alluded to the fact that this view of special educators as separate and different from regular educators was supported by separate university preparation programs. They believed special and regular educators should learn more about each others' roles, pedagogies, and knowledge in an effort to support greater collaboration among professional teachers. In this era of inclusive practices, university educators interested in furthering collaboration and communication within the profession must take a closer look at the impact of preparation programs on this view of teachers as belonging to separate uncommunicative sub groups.

Themes from this study indicate student teachers made strong connections between university preparation and actual classroom practice in student teaching experiences that allow autonomy and reflective opportunities in the presence of professionals who honor this autonomy and reflection as essential for this development. There is further evidence that this strong professional should be a teacher whose own teaching practice is strongly aligned with university preparation programs. In the presence of such a teaching mentor, reflections about the experience can be shared, supported, and encouraged. Within these reflective opportunities, there is the possibility of teacher change and professional growth as student teachers acquire an awareness of how their beliefs, values, prior dispositions, preparation, and building ecologies contribute to their professional development.

For Professional Development. The teaching profession's need for greater understanding and collaboration between professionals is evidenced in this study by the confrontations concerning inclusion initiatives within each building ecology. On many occasions, these student teachers encountered situations in which collegial collaboration and mutual professional support were absent due to lack of understanding and awareness of the values and work of both special educators and regular educators. Hargreaves and Fullan's (1992) descriptor of "balkanized cultures" easily comes to mind as the phrases of "them against us," "atmosphere of tensions and anger," "no one can suggest putting a DH student in their class" are read in these special educators' journals. These researchers and others allude to the belief that schools must reflect a collegial atmosphere in which teaching growth is supported if professional development is to continue. University educators interested in supporting continued professional growth must concern themselves with creating professionals who have a clear understanding of the various roles and responsibilities within a teaching culture and who are prepared to contribute to a collegial atmosphere with values of respect and support for all professionals in a building.

For Personal Sense Making. As Vonk (1995a) maintains, the element of the person and the personal is paramount to the teaching experience. The act of teaching cannot be separated from the "instrument of the person." This study revealed these student teachers to be active meaning makers and learners from their encounters in each situation. This learning was unavoidably colored and intertwined with the previous conceptions and prior images of being not only a teacher but also a learner.

Aware that these prior images and perceptions are such important aspects of beginning teachers' understanding of their roles and teaching, university educators must take into account the strength of these prior perceptions. Prospective teachers must be encouraged to attend to this significant landscape of expectations and prior images in an effort to confront the way in which these prior beliefs affect their eventual teaching practice and the adjustment to the teaching culture.

This study revealed that these student teachers were not passive clones of the status quo teaching culture. They were capable of autonomous actions and decision making in an environment that supported their autonomy. Awareness of the active sense making of these student teachers and their willingness to act autonomously can only fill university educators with hope for the possibility of teacher growth and change. It is to be hoped that greater understanding of what is salient to all educators will be translated into preparation programs designed to better prepare teachers for their future place in the profession.

This is one study. It is unique, constrained by culture, time, and my interpretation. However, the understanding generated from the study contributes to the knowledge of what is salient to special educators. Further research into the student teaching experience of special educators is needed in order for university educators to better prepare special educators for the complex roles and numerous responsibilities they will encounter in "this place called school" (Goodlad, 1990).

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